

Figure 10, kindly add the reference character 758B for the leader line directed to the rack tab of the trim ring, and add reference character 720 with a leader line and arrow head pointing toward the wheel.

A separate letter to the Official Draftsman in accordance with MPEP 608.02(r) is enclosed herewith. The undersigned will have the drawings corrected in an approved manner upon receiving the Examiner's approval of the above requested corrections. Additionally, a copy of the drawings with the proposed changes marked in red is provided for the Examiner's convenience.

**Remarks**

To highlight the distinction of the above referenced invention over the prior art as interpreted by the Examiner in the Office Action of July 3, 2002, Paper No.3, the specification and claims were amended as set forth herein. Claims 1, 5, 7, 9-15, 18-21, 24, 25 and 27-28 were amended to more clearly define the subject matter of the invention and to place all of the claims remaining in the application in condition for allowance. The specification was amended herein to correct matters of a grammatical and typographical nature. No new matter was presented and such amendments are deemed unobjectionable. Entry thereof is respectfully requested.

The Examiner rejected independent Claim 1 and dependent Claim 2 under 35 U.S.C. §102(b) as being anticipated by Lyon, U.S. Patent 2,729,512. The Examiner rejected independent Claim 1 and dependent Claim 3 under 35 U.S.C.

§102(b) as being anticipated by Lyon, U.S. Patent 2,906,559. The Examiner also rejected independent Claim 1 and dependent Claims 2 and 4 under 35 U.S.C. §102(b) as being anticipated by Kachler, U.S. Patent 3,724,905. The undersigned attorney respectfully traverses the Examiner's rejection under 35 U.S.C. §102(b) in view of the claims herein amended and the following arguments.

The test for determining if a reference anticipates a claim, for purposes of a rejection under 35 U.S.C. §102 is whether the reference discloses all the elements of the claimed combination, or the mechanical equivalents, functioning in substantially the same way to produce substantially the same results. As most recently noted by the Court of Appeals of the Federal Circuit in *Lindemann Maschinenfabrick GmbH v. American Hoist and Derrick*, 221 USPQ 481, 485 (1984), in evaluating the sufficiency of an anticipation rejection under 35 U.S.C. §102, the Court stated:

“Anticipation requires the presence in a single prior art reference disclosure of each and every element of the claimed invention, arranged as in the claim.”

Applicants' amended independent Claim 1 requires:

1. (Amended) A composite wheel assembly comprising:
  - “a wheel...;
  - a trim ring secured to said outboard surface of said wheel, **said trim ring covering said lip and at least a portion of said radially outer surface of said rim flange of said wheel;** and
  - a cladding secured to said outboard surface of said wheel;
  - means for attaching said trim ring and said cladding to said outboard surface of said wheel, **said attaching means configured to overlap said trim ring and said cladding in**

**a radial direction regardless of tolerance variations of said trim ring and said cladding whereby said radial overlapping relationship gives a visible impression that said trim ring and said cladding form a single wheel cover element.”**

Applicants’ amended independent Claim 5 requires:

5. (Amended) A composite wheel assembly comprising:
  - “a wheel...;
  - a trim ring... having a **radially outer wall covering at least a portion of said radially outer surface of said rim flange of said wheel**; a radially inner wall covering said radially inner surface of said rim flange of said wheel; and a lip portion extending from said radially outer wall to said radially inner wall of said trim ring whereby said trim ring covers at least a portion of said outboard surface and said rim flange to create a visible impression that said trim ring is an integral portion of said outboard surface of said wheel and not a separately attached component;
  - means for securing said trim ring to said wheel;
  - a cladding secured to at least a portion of said outboard surface of said wheel; and
  - means for securing said cladding to said wheel;
  - whereby said **trim ring and said cladding are configured to overlap in a radial direction regardless of tolerance variation of said trim ring and said cladding** such that said overlapping relationship gives a visible impression that said trim ring and said cladding form a single wheel cover element.”

Applicants’ amended independent Claim 24 requires:

- “24. A wheel covering combination for covering a wheel to produce a composite wheel assembly, said wheel covering comprising:
  - a wheel...;
  - a trim ring... **covering said lip portion of said rim flange and at least a portion of said radially outer surface of said rim flange of said wheel** thereby conforming to at least a portion of said outboard surface of said wheel to

provide a visible impression that said trim ring is actually part of said wheel;

a cladding secured to said outboard surface of said wheel; and

means for attaching said trim ring and said cladding to said wheel, said **attaching means configured to overlap said trim ring and said cladding in a radial direction regardless of tolerance variation of said trim ring and said cladding** whereby said overlapping relationship gives a visible impression that said trim ring and said cladding form a single wheel cover element covering said outboard surface of said wheel.”

Applicants’ amended independent Claim 25 requires:

“25. (Amended) A method for producing a composite wheel assembly comprising the steps of:

providing a wheel...;

providing a trim ring having a flange portion and a U-shaped portion extending from said flange portion, said trim ring further having a central opening of a predetermined inner diameter;

providing a cladding having a predetermined outer diameter wherein said predetermined outer diameter is greater than said predetermined inner diameter of said trim ring;

**assembling said trim ring to said wheel such that... said trim ring radially and axially covers at least a portion of said radially outer surface of said rim flange of said wheel; and**

**assembling said cladding to said outboard surface of said wheel such that said trim ring and said cladding overlap in a radial direction regardless of tolerance variation of said trim ring and said cladding** whereby said overlapping relationship of said trim ring and said cladding gives a visible impression that said trim ring and said cladding form a single wheel cover element.”

As shown in Figure 2 of both Lyon ‘512 and Lyon ‘559, neither reference discloses a trim ring covering at least a portion of the radially outer surface of a rim

flange as required in Applicants' amended independent Claims 1, 5 and 24. Correspondingly, Figure 2 makes equally clear that neither Lyon '512 or Lyon '559 disclose the step of assembling a trim ring such that the trim ring radially and axially covers at least a portion of the radially outer surface of a rim flange as required in Applicants' amended independent Claim 25. Additionally, neither Lyon '512 or Lyon '559 disclose a trim ring and a cladding configured to overlap in a radial direction regardless of tolerance variations of the trim ring and the cladding, as required in Applicants' amended independent Claims 1, 5 and 24. Finally, neither Lyon '512 or Lyon '559 disclose the step of assembling a cladding such that a trim ring and the cladding overlap in a radial direction regardless of tolerance variations of the trim ring and the cladding, as required in Applicants' amended independent Claim 25.

As shown in Figures 3 and 4, Kachler does not disclose a trim ring covering at least a portion of the radially outer surface of a rim flange as required in Applicants' amended independent Claims 1, 5 and 24. Similarly, Figures 3 and 4 show that Kachler does not disclose the step of assembling a trim ring such that the trim ring radially and axially covers at least a portion of the radially outer surface of a rim flange as required in Applicants' amended independent Claim 25. Additionally, Kachler does not disclose a trim ring and a cladding configured to overlap in a radial direction regardless of tolerance variations of the trim ring and the cladding, as required in Applicants' amended independent Claims 1, 5 and 24. Finally, Kachler does not disclose the step of

assembling a cladding such that a trim ring and the cladding overlap in a radial direction regardless of tolerance variations of the trim ring and the cladding, as required in Applicants' amended independent Claim 25.

Therefore, in applying the test for anticipation as set forth in *Lindemann Maschinenfabrick GmbH v. American Hoist and Derrick*, supra, Lyon '512, Lyon '559 and Kachler do not anticipate independent Claims 1, 5, 24 or 25. Further, under principles of claim dependency, Lyon '512, Lyon '559 and Kachler do not anticipate Applicants' dependent claims either. Accordingly, withdrawal of the rejection of Claims 1-4 under 35 U.S.C. §102 is respectfully requested.

In the Office Action of July 3, 2002, Paper No. 3, the Examiner rejected Claims 25 and 27 under 35 U.S.C. §103 as being unpatentable over Lyon, U.S. Patent 2,970,014. Applicants' attorney respectfully traverses each of the 35 U.S.C. §103 rejections set forth herein in view of the claims as pending herein and for the reason that Applicants' invention is not an obvious improvement over the prior art.

With respect to the rejections under 35 U.S.C. §103, it is noted in MPEP Section 706 that the standard of patentability to be followed in the examination of a patent application is that which was enunciated by the Supreme Court in *Graham v. John Deere*, 148 USPQ 459 (1966), where the Court stated:

"Under Section 103, the scope and the content of the prior art are to be determined; differences between the prior art and the claims at issue are to be ascertained; and the level of ordinary skill in the pertinent art resolved."

Accordingly, to establish a prima facie case of obviousness, the Patent Office must; (1) set forth the differences in the claim over the applied references; (2) set forth the proposed modification of the references which would be necessary to arrive at the claimed subject matter; and (3) explain why the proposed modifications would be obvious. To satisfy step (3) above, the Patent Office must identify where the prior art provides a motivating suggestion, inference or implication to make the modifications proposed in step (2) above. *In re Jones*, 21 USPQ2d 1941(Fed. Cir. 1992).

The mere fact that the prior art may be modified by the Examiner does not make the modification obvious unless the prior art suggests the desirability for the modification. *In re Fritch*, 23 USPQ2d 1780 (Fed. Cir. 1992). In the present case, the Examiner has failed to make a proper prima facie showing of obviousness since the Examiner has failed to show how the prior art suggests the desirability of the proposed modification.

Lyon '014 is directed to the problem of exposed rim flanges contrasting with a wheel cover and thereby diminishing the overall aesthetic appearance of the wheel assembly. To overcome this problem, Lyon '014 teaches a wheel assembly including a trim ring and a wheel cover applied in press-on, pry-off relation to the outboard side of a vehicle wheel. The vehicle wheel has a disk spider body and a rim. The rim has a terminal flange which projects

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generally radially and then axially outwardly. Wheel balancing weights may be mounted on the terminal flange.

The wheel cover includes a plurality of axially inward resilient retaining finger extensions having retaining terminals adapted to be resiliently deflected radially inwardly, thereby affording tensioned cover retaining thrust of the retaining terminals against the engaged portion of the wheel. The wheel cover is applied to the outer side of the wheel with the terminal flange substantially exposed radially outwardly beyond the radially outermost edge of the wheel cover.

The trim ring is provided to concealingly overlay the terminal flange of the rim and the wheel balancing weights such that the wheel cover appears to extend entirely to the sidewall of the tire. The trim ring has a radially outermost turned edge portion and a radially innermost marginal flange portion. The trim ring is attached to the wheel assembly by clamping the marginal flange portion between the radially outermost edge of the wheel cover and the rim.

Applicants' invention is directed to the problems of diminished aesthetic appearance resulting from cladded wheel assemblies wherein the wheel cladding does not closely follow the contour of the underlying wheel so as to appear part thereof, and/or wherein the outermost radial portion of the rim is exposed. Applicants' invention is further directed to the problem of excessive expense associated with maintaining sufficiently tight wheel cover tolerances such that the wheel cover is properly retained on the wheel.

To overcome the problems of diminished aesthetic appearance, Applicants' teach a wheel assembly including a trim ring, a cladding and a wheel. The wheel has a disc and a rim circumscribing the disc. The rim terminates in a rim flange that defines a radially outermost surface of the wheel. The trim ring is configured to closely follow the contour of the rim flange so as to appear an integral part thereof. The trim ring is also configured to radially and axially cover at least a portion of the radially outermost surface of the rim flange of the wheel such that the wheel is not exposed to visual observations.

To overcome the problem of excessive expense associated with maintaining tight wheel cover tolerances, Applicants' teach a wheel cover assembly that includes a cladding and a trim ring. The cladding and trim ring are configured to radially overlap by a predetermined amount. Applicants' overlapping multiple-piece construction allows the components to be independently attached to the center and radially outermost portions of the wheel such that excess radial tolerance variations in the components is taken up by the overlapping relationship therebetween.

The differences between Applicants' invention and the prior art reference cited by the Examiner in the rejection under 35 U.S.C. §103 are quite clear. The solutions taught by Applicants' are directed to problems totally different than those described in Lyon '014. For example, Applicants' invention is directed to the problems diminished aesthetic appearance resulting from wheel assemblies wherein the wheel cover does not closely follow the contour of the underlying wheel so as to appear part thereof, and to the excessive expense

associated with maintaining sufficiently tight wheel cover tolerances such that the wheel cover is properly retained on the wheel. There is no indication that Lyon '014 recognized any of the aforementioned problems addressed by Applicants. Furthermore, there is no motivation, inference or suggestion in the teachings of Lyon '014 to address the problems that Applicants have solved with the invention disclosed in their application. Absent recognition of the problem faced by the Applicants, the prior art cannot possibly suggest a solution as novel as Applicants' invention. Accordingly, Applicants' invention is an unobvious improvement over the prior art and not an obvious modification of the reference cited by the Examiner.

On page 3, lines 5-6 of the Office Action of July 3, 2002, Paper No. 3, the Examiner provides "The trim ring 30 covers at least a portion of the rim flange, and includes a lip portion 31 which is positioned over the flange lip of the rim flange as seen in figure 2." It is respectfully suggested that Applicants' independent Claim 25 as amended teaches a step wherein a trim ring is attached to a wheel such that a portion of the trim ring radially and axially covers at least a portion of a radially outer surface of a rim flange of a wheel, and that there is no teaching or suggestion related to such a step in Lyon '014.

Although Lyon '014 teaches a step wherein a trim ring is attached to a wheel such that a portion of the trim ring extends radially beyond and thus, when viewed in the axial direction, covers a portion of a radially outer surface of a rim flange of a wheel, the trim ring is not attached so as to axially cover any portion of a radially outer surface or flange lip

of the rim flange of a wheel. One of the problems addressed by Applicants and identified hereinabove includes diminished aesthetic appearance resulting from wheel assemblies wherein the wheel cover does not closely follow the contour of the underlying wheel so as to appear part thereof. Applicants' address this problem in part by teaching a trim ring closely following the contour of an outer surface of a rim flange of a wheel, in both a radial and axial direction. Conversely, Lyon '014 teaches a trim ring extending radially beyond an outer surface of a rim flange of a wheel, whereby the trim ring does not closely follow the contour of the outer surface of the rim flange of the wheel in an axial direction and thus does not solve the problem identified by Applicants.

Furthermore, Lyon '014 does not teach a step of assembling a cladding to a wheel such that a trim ring and the cladding overlap in a radial direction regardless of tolerance variation of the trim ring and the cladding, as taught in Applicants' amended Claim 25. One of the problems addressed by Applicants and identified hereinabove includes excessive expense associated with maintaining sufficiently tight wheel cover tolerances such that the wheel cover is properly retained on the wheel. In response to this problem, Applicants' teach a radial overlapping relationship of the trim ring and cladding wherein the amount of overlap is variable in order to compensate for tolerance variations of the trim ring and the cladding, such that it is not necessary to maintain tight tolerances of the wheel cover. Lyon '014 teaches a radial outer edge 22 of a wheel cover 5 seated in a reentrant groove 33 of a trim ring 30 to center the wheel cover 5 relative to a wheel. Accordingly, Lyon '014

teaches a wheel cover requiring tight tolerances on the outer diameter thereof to insure proper centering thereof, and thus does not solve the problem identified by Applicants.

In view of the foregoing remarks, the undersigned attorney respectfully submits that Applicants' independent Claim 25 is in proper form, defines patentably over the prior art, and is clearly allowable. Further, under principles of claim dependency, any claims dependent from Claim 25 are also allowable. Applicants additionally submit that for reasons analogous to those articulated hereinabove in support of the patentability of the independent method Claim 25 over Lyon '014, the amended independent apparatus Claims 1, 5 and 24, and the claims dependent therefrom, include elements not taught by Lyon '014. Applicants' attorney, therefore, respectfully requests that the Examiner's rejections under 35 U.S.C. §103 be reconsidered and withdrawn and that a formal Notice of Allowance of the application be issued.

The undersigned wishes to express his appreciation to the Examiner for the indication that Claims 5-24 are allowed. It should be appreciated that any amendments thereto were merely intended to more clearly define the subject matter of the invention and to place all of the claims remaining in the application in condition for allowance. Further, the undersigned respectfully acknowledges the Examiner's indication that Claims 26 and 28 would be allowable if rewritten in independent form to include all the limitations of the base claim and any intervening claims. It is, however, respectfully asserted that for the reasons set forth above, Claims 26 and 28 are allowable in their present form since they depend from

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what has been shown to be an allowable claim. Formal allowance thereof is, therefore, respectfully requested.

In accordance with the provisions of 37 CFR §1.121, a marked up version of the revised claims to show all the changes is included herewith as Exhibit A. Similarly, as indicated above, a marked up version of the amended specification paragraphs is attached as Exhibit B.

If the Examiner has any questions with respect to any matter now of record, Applicants' attorney may be reached at (248) 362-1210.

Respectfully submitted,

VANOPHEM & VANOPHEM, P.C.



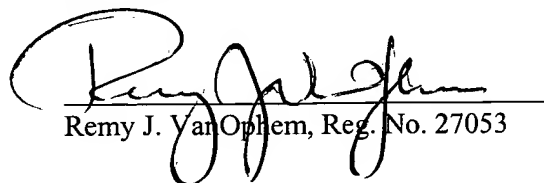
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Certificate under 37 CFR §1.8(a)

I hereby certify that this correspondence is being deposited with the United States Postal Service as first class mail in an envelope addressed to: Assistant Commissioner for Patents, Washington, D.C. 20231, on November 4, 2002.

Date: November 4, 2002



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EXHIBIT A  
Version of Proposed Claim Amendments With Markings to  
Show Changes Made

1. (Amended) A composite wheel assembly comprising:

a wheel [comprising] having an outboard surface thereon, said wheel further [comprising] having a disc and a rim [complementary to] circumscribing said disc, said rim [having] terminating in a rim flange [circumscribing said disc and said rim] having a radially outer surface, said rim flange further having a lip at an axially outermost portion thereof; [, at least one of said disc, said rim, and said rim flange defining said outboard surface of said wheel;]

a trim ring secured to said outboard surface of said wheel, said trim ring covering said lip and at least a portion of said [rim flange] radially outer surface of said rim flange of said wheel; [and]

a cladding secured to said outboard surface of said wheel[, said cladding covering at least a portion of said disc of said wheel]; and

means for attaching said trim ring and said cladding to said outboard surface of said wheel, said attaching means configured to overlap said trim ring and said cladding in a radial direction regardless of tolerance variations [one] of said trim ring and said cladding whereby said radial overlapping relationship gives a visible impression that said trim ring and said cladding form a single wheel cover element. [overlapping a portion of the other of said trim ring and said cladding in a complementary relationship, so that any radial dimensional variation in said trim ring and said cladding, with respect to said wheel, is taken up by said overlapping relationship.]

5. (Amended) A composite wheel assembly comprising:

a wheel having [a central axis] an outboard surface thereon, said wheel [comprising] further having a disc portion and a rim portion circumscribing said disc portion, said rim portion terminating in a rim flange [circumscribing said disc wherein at least a portion of said disc and said rim flange define an outboard surface of said wheel, said rim flange] having a flange lip at an axially outermost portion thereof; [circumscribing said central axis of said wheel, said rim flange comprising an axially outboard surface extending substantially radially outward, said rim flange further comprising] a radially inner surface; and [extending substantially axially outboard from said axially outboard surface,] a radially outer surface substantially opposite said radially inner surface, [and a] said flange lip connecting said radially inner and outer surfaces;

a trim ring mounted to [at least a portion of] said outboard surface of said wheel, said trim ring [comprising] having a flange portion covering at least a portion of said outboard surface of said wheel, and a U-shaped portion extending from said flange portion, said U-shaped portion having a [flange portion] radially outer wall covering at least a portion of said [axially outboard] radially outer surface of said rim flange of said wheel; a radially inner wall covering said radially inner surface of said rim flange of said wheel; and [, said trim ring further comprising] a lip portion extending from said radially outer wall to said radially inner wall of said trim ring [flange portion, said lip portion being positioned over at least a portion of said flange lip of said rim flange of said wheel thereby substantially conforming to at least a portion of said outboard surface of said wheel, said lip portion comprising a radially inner wall at least partially covering said radially inner surface of said flange lip, said lip portion further comprising a radially outer wall opposite said radially inner wall and at least partially covering said radially

outer surface of said flange lip, said lip portion further comprising an axially outboard wall between said radially inner and outer walls and at least partially covering said flange lip of said rim flange,] whereby said trim ring covers at least [portions] a portion of said [axially] outboard surface and said [flange lip of said] rim flange to [provide] create a visible impression that said trim ring is [a] an integral portion of said outboard surface of said wheel and not a separately attached component;

means for securing said trim ring to said wheel;

a cladding [overlying] secured to at least a portion of said outboard surface of said wheel[, said cladding comprising an inboard surface facing at least a portion of said outboard surface of said wheel]; and

means for securing said cladding to said wheel;

whereby [at least a portion of one of] said trim ring and said cladding are configured to overlap in a radial direction regardless of tolerance variation of [overlapping at least a portion of the other of] said trim ring and said cladding [in an] such that said overlapping relationship[, so that any radial dimensional variation in said trim ring and said cladding is taken up by said overlapping relationship so as to provide a continuous bright appearance across said outboard surface of said wheel.] gives a visible impression that said trim ring and said cladding form a single wheel cover element.

7. (Amended) The composite wheel assembly as claimed in claim 5, wherein said means for securing said cladding to said wheel comprises:

an annular detent provided in said disc portion of said wheel; and

a plurality of protuberances extending [axially inwardly] in a direction axially inward from said [inboard surface of said] cladding, each of said plurality of

protuberances resiliently engaging said annular detent of said disc portion of said wheel so as to secure said cladding to said outboard surface of said wheel, said plurality of protuberances [causing] concentrically locating said cladding [to be centrally located] with respect to said rim flange of said wheel and spaced from said outboard surface of said wheel so as to define at least one gap therebetween.

9. (Amended) The composite wheel assembly as claimed in claim 5, wherein said means for securing said trim ring to said wheel further comprises an interlocking portion on said rim flange of said wheel [further comprises an interlocking portion thereon] and a complementary interlocking portion on said trim ring. [further comprises an interlocking portion thereon, said means for securing said trim ring to said wheel comprising said interlocking portions of said trim ring and said rim flange being interlocked together.]

10. (Amended) The composite wheel assembly as claimed in claim 9, wherein said interlocking portion of said trim ring comprises an annular hem formed in said radially outer wall of said [lip] U-shaped portion of said trim ring and said interlocking portion of said rim flange of said wheel comprises an annular groove in said [flange lip] radially outer surface of said rim flange, whereby said annular hem engages said annular groove for securing said trim ring to said wheel.

11. (Amended) The composite wheel assembly as claimed in claim 9, wherein said interlocking portion of said trim ring comprises an annular bead in said radially outer wall of said [lip] U-shaped portion of said trim ring and said interlocking portion of said rim flange of said wheel comprises an annular groove in said radially outer surface [of

said rim flange] of said rim flange, whereby said annular bead engages said annular groove for securing said trim ring to said wheel.

12. (Amended) The composite wheel assembly as claimed in claim 9, wherein said interlocking portion of said trim ring comprises a hem portion in said radially outer wall of said [lip] U-shaped portion of said trim ring, and said interlocking portion of said rim flange of said wheel comprises a tapered portion of said radially outer [wall] surface, said tapered portion being configured to [being tapered to] slope in a radially inwardly and axially inboard direction whereby said hem portion of said trim ring grippingly engages said tapered portion [flange lip] of said rim flange of said wheel.

13. (Amended) The composite wheel assembly as claimed in claim 5, wherein said radially outer [wall] surface of said rim flange [of said rim flange] is [fully] beveled to slope in a radially inwardly and axially outboard direction.

14. (Amended) The composite wheel assembly as claimed in claim 5, wherein said radially outer [wall] surface of said rim flange [includes] has a shoulder portion and is [partially] beveled to slope in a radially inwardly and axially outboard direction from said shoulder portion.

15. (Amended) The composite wheel assembly as claimed in claim 5, wherein said radially outer wall of said [lip] U-shaped portion of said trim ring [comprises] has a wheel weight bead [therein] for retaining a wheel weight thereto.

18. (Amended) The composite wheel assembly as claimed in claim 17, wherein said at least a portion of said trim ring [comprises] has a radial projection that overlaps said at least a portion of said cladding.

19. (Amended) The composite wheel assembly as claimed in claim 18, wherein said radially inner wall of said [lip] U-shaped portion of said trim ring terminates in an axially extending tab portion.

20. (Amended) The composite wheel assembly as claimed in claim 17, wherein said cladding [comprises] has an annular groove [therein] and said trim ring [comprises an] has a complementary annular projection [that interlocks] adapted to interlock with said annular groove.

21. (Amended) The composite wheel assembly as claimed in claim 5, wherein [at least] one of said trim ring and said cladding is surface treated and [at least one] the other of said trim ring and said cladding is painted so as to provide a two-tone appearance to said wheel.

24. A wheel covering combination for covering a wheel to produce a composite wheel assembly, said wheel covering comprising:

a [said] wheel having an outboard surface thereon, said wheel further having a disc and a rim circumscribing said disc, said rim having a rim flange defined at a radially outermost portion thereof, said rim flange having a flange lip at an axially outermost portion thereof, said rim flange further having [circumscribing said disc and a central axis of said wheel, said rim flange comprising an axially outboard surface extending substantially radially outward, said rim flange further comprising] a radially inner surface [extending substantially axially outboard from said axially outboard surface,] and a radially outer surface substantially opposite said radially inner surface, [and a] said flange lip connecting said radially inner and outer surfaces; [, said wheel covering combination comprising:]

a trim ring mounted to at least a portion of said rim flange of said wheel, said trim ring [comprising] having a flange portion covering at least a portion of said [axially] outboard surface of said wheel, said trim ring further [comprising] having a [lip] U-shaped portion extending from said flange portion, said [lip] U-shaped portion [being positioned over] covering said lip portion of said rim flange and at least a portion of said [flange lip] radially outer surface of said rim flange of said wheel thereby conforming to at least a portion of said outboard surface of said wheel to provide a visible impression that said trim ring is actually part of said wheel; [and]

a cladding [overlaying at least a portion of said wheel, said cladding comprising an inboard surface complementary to and facing at least a portion of] secured to said outboard surface of said wheel[, such that said cladding substantially conforms to at least a portion of said outboard surface of said wheel to provide a visible impression that said cladding is actually said outboard surface of said wheel]; and

means for attaching said trim ring and said cladding to said wheel, said attaching means configured to overlap [at least a portion of one of] said trim ring and said cladding [overlapping at least a portion of the other of] in a radial direction regardless of tolerance variation of said trim ring and said cladding whereby [in a complementary relationship on said wheel, so that any radial dimensional variation in said trim ring and said cladding is taken up by] said overlapping relationship gives a visible impression that said trim ring and said cladding form a single wheel cover element covering [and so as to provide a continuous bright appearance across] said outboard surface of said wheel.

25. (Amended) A method for producing a composite wheel assembly comprising the steps of:

providing a wheel having an outboard surface thereon, said wheel [comprising] further having a disc and a rim [flange] circumscribing said disc, [at least a portion of said disc and rim flanges defining an outboard surface of said wheel,] said rim [flange comprising an axially outboard surface extending substantially radially outward,] having a rim flange defined at a radially outermost portion thereof, said rim flange [further comprising] having a radially inner surface; [extending substantially axially outboard from said axially outboard surface,] a radially outer surface substantially opposite said radially inner surface; [,] and a flange lip connecting said radially inner and outer surfaces;

providing a trim ring[, said trim ring comprising] having a flange portion and a [lip] U-shaped portion extending from said flange portion, said trim ring further [comprising] having a central opening of a predetermined [inside] inner diameter;

providing a cladding[, said cladding comprising an inboard surface, said cladding further comprising] having a predetermined [outside] outer diameter wherein said predetermined [outside] outer diameter is greater than said predetermined [inside] inner diameter of said trim ring;

assembling said trim ring to said wheel such that said flange portion of said trim ring covers at least a portion of said [rim flange] outboard surface of said wheel and said [lip] U-shaped portion of said trim ring radially and axially covers at least a portion of said radially outer surface of said rim flange [lip] of said wheel[, whereby said trim ring covers at least a portion of said outboard surface of said wheel]; and

assembling said cladding to said [wheel such that said inboard surface of said cladding faces said] outboard surface of said wheel such that said trim ring and said

cladding overlap in a radial direction regardless of tolerance variation of [, whereby said cladding overlays at least a portion of said outboard surface of said wheel; one of said assembling steps including overlapping at least a portion of one of] said trim ring and said cladding [over at least a portion of the other of] whereby said overlapping relationship of said trim ring and said cladding[; whereby at least a portion of one of said trim ring and said cladding overlap at least a portion of the other of said trim ring and said cladding in an overlapping relationship, so that any radial dimensional variation in said trim ring and said cladding is taken up by said overlapping relationship.] gives a visible impression that said trim ring and said cladding form a single wheel cover element.

27. (Amended) The method as claimed in claim 25, wherein said step of assembling said cladding to said outboard surface of said wheel comprises assembling at least a portion of said cladding [in overlapping fashion] axially outboard with respect to at least a portion of said trim ring.

28. (Amended) The method as claimed in claim 25, wherein said step of assembling said [trim ring] cladding to said outboard surface of said wheel comprises assembling [overlapping] at least a portion of said cladding axially inboard with respect to at least a portion of said trim ring [with respect to at least a portion of said cladding].